

Barn, R. (in press) Transracial Adoption in the USA: Adoptive Mothers' Constructions of Social Capital in Raising Their Adopted Children, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

## **Transracial Adoption in the USA: Adoptive Mothers' Constructions of Social Capital in Raising Their Adopted Children**

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### **Abstract**

In the field of adoption and child welfare, there is ongoing debate and discussion about how white adoptive parents in transracial families construct personal and social relationships and networks to promote cultural belonging and identity development in their children. In spite of this however, there is, to date, no research study that has sought to apply the notion of social capital to understand transracial adoptive families. With its exploration of how white American adoptive mothers construct social capital in raising their transracially adopted children, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature on social capital and families in general, and social capital and transracial families in particular. By drawing upon a qualitative study involving white adoptive mothers' discursive practices, and multiplex constructions of intersectionality, the paper seeks to offer rich theoretical and empirical insights into social capital and transracial adoption to contribute to the literature in this area.

**Key words:** transracial, white adoptive mothers, social capital, intersectionality, USA, adoption, racialized boundaries

### **Introduction**

Concern about the situation of transracially adopted children, particularly, around poor racial/ethnic identity development and a sense of belonging have continued to persist. And the ability of white adoptive parents to raise bi-cultural children who are comfortable in their

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own skin remains a critical area of concern (Barn 2013). The debates around Transracial Adoption (TRA) have generally taken the form of two polarised positions – firstly, those who argue that such placements do no harm and in fact are preferable to institutional care (Grow and Shapiro 1974, Zastrow 1977, Shireman and Johnson 1988, Barth and Berry 1988, Simon and Alstein 1996); and secondly those who document the negative experiences of TRA (both domestic and international) in terms of belonging and culture (Kim 1977, Andujo 1988, Wickes and Slate 1996, Vroegh 1997, McGinnis et al, 2009).

One area that has been accorded limited research attention in the TRA literature concerns the social networks of such families. Thus, whilst there has been some considerable attention given to adoptive parents' characteristics and motivations, and socialization practices (McRoy et al 1984, Andujo 1988, Crolley-Simic and Vonk 2001, Lee et al 2006, Barn 2013, Boivin and Hassan 2015), we know little about the personal and social relationships they develop and maintain in raising bi-cultural children (Thomas and Tessler 2007). Wider literature on child development, parental socialization and community influences has led to some attention being focused on TRA families' networks (Brooks-Gunn et al 1993, Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Moreover, research evidence into minority ethnic families and cultural socialization which suggests that parental networks promote bi-cultural competence and is deemed to have advantageous outcomes, is also of relevance in the field of TRA (Boykin and Toms 1985, Thornton et al 1990, Stevenson 1995, Hughes and Chen 1999).

In a longitudinal study of 327 European American adoptive parents of children adopted from China, Thomas and Tessler (2007) found that parental social networks of Chinese adults helped promote children's Chinese cultural competence. The study concluded that adults from the child's ethnic background in white adoptive parents' network served as

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important role models and 'appeared to act as enablers of their children's socialization into Chinese culture' (Thomas and Tessler 2007:1212). The researchers acknowledge the limitations of their quantitative study and concede that social networks are more complex than simply the number of adults who share the child's ethnicity. Arguably, the quality of the relationships, the resources embedded in these relationships and patterns of interactions are an important area of study. This paper attempts to address this gap with its focus on social capital through firsthand accounts of adoptive parents. In doing this, the concept of intersectionality is also explored for its relevance in understanding social capital formation.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Since the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), and the popularizing of the concept by Putnam (1993, 1995), there has been considerable and growing interest in social capital and families. Similarly, since Kimberlè Crenshaw first wrote about this in 1989, the concept of intersectionality remains an important analytical tool in understanding subjects' experiences of both identity and oppression. An attempt is made here to apply these two theoretical notions to conceptualise the findings of this study.

Social capital is broadly conceptualised as 'the values that people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in and are the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships' (Edwards et al 2003:2). It has been argued that 'whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships (Portes 1998:7). The functionality of social capital through relationships ensures the effectiveness of the sharing of information and knowledge, and the ways in which self-efficacy and social networks can be enhanced for the purposes of support, social belongingness, and social and cultural identity.

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Intersectionality on the other hand is understood as an important analytical tool in 'conceptualizing the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity and other social divisions' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 193). It is used here not as a theory of marginalized subjectivity but as a generalized theory of identity to understand the experiences of white adoptive mothers (Nash 2008).

Crucially, and despite their popularity, both social capital and intersectionality as concepts remain empirically and theoretically contested and elusive. However, the notions of 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking' capital provide a conceptual and operational framework to help understand the ties and relationships and the resources embedded in these (Putnam 1995, Narayan 1999, Halpern 2005, Norris and Inglehart 2013). 'Bonding' social capital is conceptualised as embedded within a homogeneous network, that is, relationships and resources among those who are perceived to be similar to each other. 'Bridging' social capital is regarded as ties and relationships that are constructed with those who are conceptually heterogeneous and different from oneself. For example, such difference may be based on gender, social class, faith, sexuality or ethnicity. And 'linking' social capital is concerned about the ways in which individuals link with resources that may be formal and informal. It is recognised that there may well be tensions and trade-offs between these different forms of social capital. For example, Putnam (2002) argues that externalities of groups that are bridging are likely to be positive while networks that are bonding (limited within particular niches) are at greater risk of producing externalities that are negative. The application of the concept of intersectionality in promoting our understanding of social capital requires an analysis of how individuals experience subjectivity or strategically deploy identity (Nash 2008).

These theoretical and empirical distinctions are particularly helpful and relevant to

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considerations of how, in the process of social capital building, the axes of intersectionality in TRA families may intensify their skills and knowledge and resource for the purposes of constructing and maintaining personal and social relationships and networks with perhaps the ultimate aim of promoting their adopted children's ethnic identity development and belonging (Portes 1998, Nast and Blokland 2014). Moreover, the work of sociologists such as Burt (1992), and Granovetter (1995) affords a critical dimension to understand how weak ties can provide new and useful knowledge and resource which may not be available in more established, 'strong', and existing social relationships. Significantly, the ways in which intersections can create both oppression and opportunity is also worthy of attention (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996). There is considerable value in the application of current thinking of social capital to develop our understanding of the ways on which the notions of family, race and ethnicity, and neighbourhood intersect in our increasingly multi-racial societies (Nast and Blokland 2014; Weck and Hanhörster 2015). Using the framework of social capital and intersectionality, therefore, this paper considers how TRA families seek to promote culture and belonging through their reproduction of social and cultural relationships.

## **STUDY AIMS AND METHODS**

This study aimed to understand how white adoptive mothers constructed their personal and social relationships and networks to promote cultural belonging and identity development in their racially and ethnically different children.

Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen adoptive mothers. Since mothers are often perceived as the key actors in family organization and planning and as the main transmitters of culture (Hill and Thomas 2000, Bauer 2010), and also because many of the previous studies have included mothers, it was decided in this study

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to only focus on the accounts of mothers (Johnston et al 2007, Crolley-Simic and Vonk 2008).

Perspectives of adoptees, adoptive fathers, and other family members, including adoptees, are also important and have been given some attention elsewhere (Samuels 2009a, Samuels 2009b, Nelson 2015). The length of time a TRA family had been together was believed to be critical. A minimum of four years together as a family was taken as a measure to obtain a sense of the efforts made by mothers to construct and build social capital, and their own reflections on the successes and failures of their strategies.

The majority of the respondents who participated in this study were located in Manhattan, but a few were living in Brooklyn. Most respondents reported having lived in New York City for the best part of their adult life, but stressed that their social networks had been largely with people of their own ethnicity. This provided a crucial and consistent element to understand how families utilized this cosmopolitan context and space in building social capital when they become a transracial family. Although the study request for participants was posted on the website of a few adoption organisations, respondents were largely recruited through snowball sampling. This was made possible initially via informal contacts. The possible inherent bias in such a technique in obtaining a sample that may share similar views and experiences needs to be recognized. The sample mix in this study however is useful in countering homogeneity and possible bias.

Arguably, the findings of the present study are based on a small group of white American adoptive mothers in one cosmopolitan geographical area (Zhang and Lee 2011). The qualitative study does not and cannot claim to be representative of all white American adoptive mothers living in the USA. It does, nevertheless, offer theoretical insights grounded in diverse lived experiences in a racially and ethnically heterogeneous space.

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## **PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

The mothers in this study were well educated. Most had had a university education, some to doctoral level. Most mothers were or had been in professional middle class occupations.

Mothers' occupations ranged from teachers, social workers, business analysts, and managers in health and social care institutions. The social class bias of this sample is an important limitation of this study and we would suggest the need for a future study that focuses specifically on social class, power and ethnic relations.

The majority of the mothers (11) were married at the time of the study, as well as at the time of the adoption. The ethnic background recorded in the initial profile questionnaire included a range of self-definitions - Jewish (8), WASPS (2), Second Generation American (1), Caucasian (1), Italian American (1), White (2). The significance of racial/cultural socialization in the lives of these families, and mothers' understandings of the notion of whiteness and the impact of this on family relations forms the basis of other work arising from this study (Barn 2013). Most mothers had adopted internationally (10), and a smaller number had adopted from within the USA – primarily from New York (5). International adoptions involved children from China, Korea, and South America. Many of the domestic adoptions included African-American/bi-racial children. The majority of the children were adopted as babies (11), four were adopted at the age of 3, 4, 5 and 7, and another two were adopted as teenagers. All except two of the children were female.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the research participants and transcribed

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verbatim. A thematic analysis of the interviews was undertaken in which the theoretical framework of social capital and intersectionality, discussed above, provided the structure within which to understand mothers' views and experiences (Ritchie et al 2013). Each interview transcript was coded following transcription. Interviews underwent a further analysis and coding and re-coding in a respective comparative context along identified themes. Analytical themes included mothers' conceptualizations of the nature and extent and the ethnic diversity of familial social relationships and networks, schools as sites for social capital building, community engagement, minority role models, and links via associations and groups. The primary research question was:

- How do white (middle class and American) mothers cultivate and conceive of the need for social capital in their transracially adopted children?

Several sub-questions were raised in the process of analysis to understand mothers' views and experiences including:

- In what way do schools serve as sites for bonding and bridging social capital?
- What are adoptive mothers' experiences of civic and community engagement?
- What importance did adoptive mothers place on seeking role models for their adopted child?
- What were the experiences of adoptive mothers in forging links with individuals and groups who were deemed to be similar or different to themselves?
- In what way can the application of the notion of intersectionality help us to understand the lived reality of white adoptive mothers' social capital building?

The thematic analytic framework helped identify mothers' involvement in their immediate neighbourhoods, and in particular their construction and investment in different



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forms of social capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1987). Challenges and obstacles in this process were also considered to help understand the difficulties encountered.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Personal and social relationships**

A common theme related to 'becoming' a transracial family was located within a framework of social capital anchored in personal and social relationships. Mothers reported networks of friends and other close relations and their possible influence in facilitating adoption. This included overseas contacts as well as friendships in the USA.

It was one of those long networking things. My sister is a friend with a woman who is helping to facilitate adoptions out of India. She knew a lawyer in New York who suggested a couple of directions...

A focus on personal and social relationships with individuals within their own wider family network, and with those who shared the adopted child's ethnic background or were from other racially/ethnically different background featured significantly in the mothers' accounts. Some mothers, principally those who had adopted African-American children domestically emphasized the importance of embedding themselves and their family in the local black community networks and relationships. Such 'immersion' was described as a conscious strategy to help build personal relationships across cultures which could accrue benefits at a number of different levels from the physical and aesthetic to the emotional and social, for example, learning how to braid hair, help with child care, and group attendance at church. The accounts of two Jewish mothers of Christian African-American children, below, emphasize the resources embedded in social relationships in their immediate neighbourhood:

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I lived in a largely black neighbourhood...I realised there were things that I needed that I could get help with...neighbours teaching me how to do hair...

My best friend is African-American. Our neighbours, on either side of us are African-American and West Indian...Umm Auntie Clara across the street has helped us with child care...both of the children have gone there before and after school...we make sure that some of the professionals we deal with are people of colour. We go to church, sometimes, with our next door neighbour so that the kids are...you know...around with people that look like them...so we take it very seriously...

Notably, personal relationships were described as not a one-way process where only the adoptive families were the recipients of resource but one which entailed reciprocity and trust. For example, one mother described how she maintained contact with the adopted child's siblings to help provide help and support to them. In another case, the child's nanny who was perceived to be an embodiment of important 'ethnic resource' was provided with financial support to help her children through school.

Crucially, some participants reported experiencing atrophy, and a diminution in social capital as their own extended family network demonstrated indifference or outright hostility leading to feelings of isolation and a lack of supportiveness. Invariably, the adoptive mother's single status and age were identified as key factors in the disapproval from some family members. Although the child's ethnicity was not reported to be a direct area of concern for the wider family, the way in which the child was 'ignored', or treated less favorably was a source of worry for some adoptive mothers. These mothers reported that they had learned to disassociate themselves from such family members. One mother who had adopted from

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China emphasized how some of her family members rendered her 8-year-old daughter invisible causing her much distress to the point that she decided to ex-communicate these relations.

They ignored her completely. They actually physically pushed her away. Other children in the family were played with and were part of the doings. And when Jessica did that, it was like, somehow a palpable disruption of the order. She was being made invisible to the greatest extent that they could...and I have nothing to do with them. I don't want any contact with them. I don't need that.

Bonding social capital through relationships with others 'like them' was also a key theme. This existed in various networks including family and friends but most prominently with others who were also adoptive parents in transracial families.

In New York, I have a whole community of single mothers who have adopted from South America.

Bonding social capital is discussed further in this paper in the theme of associations/groups, below, as it was often through such efforts that mothers linked with others who were like them, that is, white adoptive parents to children of colour, single mothers, middle class mothers etc.

### **Schools as sites for social capital building**

Almost all of the mothers reported that their children had a diverse circle of friends and that this was invariably achieved through the schools they attended. It was evident that mothers

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recognized the importance of such diversity and often encouraged it and supplemented the school activities with additional input.

When she went to elementary school she strongly identified with the Hispanic girls in her class. She started doing her hair like them. It was pointedly very Hispanic. She looked like she was Puerto Rican. I made sure the school she was going to be offered Spanish. I would buy her books about (*her birth country*).

In an effort to build resource and promote understanding, some participants emphasized changing the school culture and way of doing things. Such activity exemplified how mothers became 'active agents' in building their social capital via schools. This included moving their adopted child to a more racially mixed school, as well 'encouraging' school teachers to incorporate diversity into their curriculum. Other examples where schools became the site for the construction of social capital was through the creation of relationships across cultures. Given the American history on racial segregation, it was not uncommon to hear participants' recollections of their upbringing in almost entirely monoracial white communities. The building of social capital within such a framework was said to inevitably entail a working through of previous racial baggage in order to embrace new relationships.

...our daughter goes to a dance school where the majority of kids in her class are black. It was mostly like guilt and anxiety about having to interact really, with the black culture because of how I had grown up. I mean I went to a public high school but it was very segregated. So I think we've really come around to embrace the black culture.

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### **Community engagement**

Our study reveals a process of the possibilities of bonding and bridging social capital for affluent middle class transracial families. One Jewish mother who had adopted a Christian African-American child explained the intersectionality between family, tradition and neighbourhood through the process of community engagement and bridging social capital.

...we are Jewish but we are not at all religious. We don't observe much of anything, but I realised someday someone was going to expect this kid to know how to make Christmas. So I sort of bummed Christmas. We were part of neighbours' Christmas(es), you know, American southern black family, they are very involved in their families. So she could grow up with those traditions, and have a sense of what you do traditionally, and be comfortable, and feeling it traditionally. So if she is, one day, called upon to do things...

The desire for their children to feel 'comfortable' in their navigation of the American racial discourse was a key challenge and motivation for mothers who actively sought to build relationships and tap into community resources. Crucially, there is a multitude of faiths represented among African Americans including Judaism and Islam, and a homogenization of African-American life, and racialisation of religious identity is an important concern.

Although New York is a racially and culturally diverse city with enormous possibilities of finding others such as 'oneself', it was interesting to note the enduring pursuit for commonality. Although some mothers reported that their child's interest in their heritage decreased with age, it was not uncommon for mothers to report their children's continual seeking for similarity and a quest for bonding and bridging with people who looked like them.

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This constant search and identification of similarity appeared to be particularly pronounced due to the absence of individuals and relationships in these families' networks that resembled the adopted child. In their attempts to forge networks of belonging, some mothers described their feelings of 'otherisation', feeling excluded, and eventual self-exclusion. In the quotes below, we can also see the complexity of intersectionality, space/place, and power dynamic in the formation of social capital (Tuan 1977). In the first quote, a mother (to a 7 year old Korean child) recalls her uneasiness which prevents her from developing a sense of belonging with other Korean mothers. In the second quote, another mother to a bi-racial (African-American/White) child reports her discomfort about moving to a more racially mixed neighbourhood, in spite of the possible similarity in social class. In both scenarios, mothers identify their anxiety about not fitting in. Intersectionality of social class, gender, ethnicity, and adopted status are captured in these reported feelings about perceived non-acceptance and non-belonging.

...we took him to Tae Kwon Do in Queens, I thought it would be a community for me too so that I can have Korean mothers as friends, but everyone was not adoptive and I was the only white mother, I was entirely excluded by the mothers, and he (adoptive son) became like a show case, everybody was looking at him (pause), we went about three times and he didn't want to go again...

I guess I could have moved to a different neighbourhood I mean there is St. Albans in Queens and other places...that does have a solid black middle class community, but I wasn't ready...I couldn't do it...

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### **Minority role models**

The importance of individuals who reflected the child's ethnicity was generally considered an important resource by participants. However, whilst almost all parents reported the existence of a diverse set of friends in their child's social circle, the same was not the case in their own social circle. Some mothers reported no friends and acquaintances that were from the adopted child's racial/cultural background. Such networks were not actively sought by mothers who argued that their choice of friends was not contingent upon individual ethnicities. These mothers were often the ones who described the adopted child as a New Yorker or as an American and de-emphasized the child's birth culture and heritage. The idea of white identity as being normative, symbolic and optional is being invoked here (Alba, 1990; Waters, 2010). These white adoptive mothers did not perceive the need to build social capital with individuals and groups that reflected their adopted child's racial/cultural heritage. Arguably, it could be inferred that their conceptualization of culture and identity suggests a belief that they can confer their own white racial/cultural privilege on to their child.

We are raising her just as we raised our (birth) son, you know, just a regular little family that lives in New York...(laughter)...

I feel a little bit badly that I didn't push harder to teach her more about her (South American) heritage, but at the same time she didn't really evince a real interest. She became an American child right away.

Well, culture really doesn't come with you. Culture is kind of history...it's not your history...it's your birth family's history...the culture that they grew up in...you become part of the culture that you grow up in...

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Other participants stressed that whilst their children had friends from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they (the mothers) themselves sought to ensure their own circle comprised adults of colour who could act as important role models for their adopted children. Such role models were said to come in a range of guises including relatives, friends, god parents, neighbours, babysitters, doctors, dentists, and private tutors. Interestingly, some individuals were said to perform multiple roles. For example, a babysitter was also said to be the adopted child's god parent. She also had the key responsibility of braiding the child's hair and this was perceived as an important bonding activity between the adopted child and an adult of colour. The adoptive mother in this situation described the deep bond that had developed with the babysitter who had also been asked to be god parent. It would appear that a scarcity of people of colour in the lives of some such families may lead to an expectation of multiple role functionality.

Whilst some mothers reported only one or two individuals of colour such as the child's nanny, or some professional such as a doctor or dentist; others (see quote below from an adoptive mother to a child of Chinese heritage) identified a range of individuals for the purposes of providing a more nuanced input and experience to their adopted child about identity and heterogeneity.

...ensuring that we have family and friends in our daily lives who are adult women who are Chinese American, who have come from China or have always lived here. So that my daughter is not simply relying on me to refract for her on how an adult woman might make choices in relation to dealing with identity, but how women who are Chinese American make those choices every day.



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Some participants emphasized that they actively forged relationships and chose professionals who were people of colour, and that their chosen geographical locality helped do this with ease:

It's not so hard where we live because there are a lot of people of colour...their god parents, both of them, their god mothers are black. Auntie Clara (neighbour) plays a critical role in their lives...she's West Indian. We make sure that when our younger daughter needed academic help and tutoring that we sought out a tutoring centre that was run by a black woman in a very Afro-centric way. We try to make sure that there is exposure to people, you know make sure they have people in their lives who look like them.

### **Adoption Associations/Groups**

The resources embedded in associations and groups of 'like-minded' and 'similar' individuals, that is, other white adoptive parents, were considered to be of crucial relevance. Some participants reported having joined virtual and other local and national organizations to build their networks and resource via a range of means including relationships, information and knowledge through newsletters, online recipes and other materials. There were, invariably, cultural associations and events formed around the key need to provide the adopted child with a sense of identity and comprised almost exclusively white adoptive parents in transracial adoptive family situations. Membership of such associations and groups was considered vital in helping the adopted child deal with identity and belonging.

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I joined LAPA (*Latin America Parents Association*); and they would have cultural events with their children from the various Latin American countries. We would attend the Latin American Day parade...

Mothers sought a variety of diverse ways in which to connect with the child's ethnicity and birth culture. Sharing of knowledge and information with others from such associations and groups helped participants identify various strategies and techniques designed to help develop a child's sense of self, ethnic identity and belonging. Artifacts such as national flags, personal messages/names in Chinese calligraphy, music, books, and the sharing of recipes were common practices. One mother explained how she used food to help promote her child's identity development whilst nurturing a sense of belonging and a link with the past.

...my identity is in human relationships...in food...and culture...I learned a couple of South Korean foods because I am good in the kitchen and I tell him (adopted son) that perhaps his mother ate this when she was carrying him...and hope that maybe he'll like it.

As discussed above in relation to community engagement, forging links via associations/groups presented its own challenges. Whilst mothers recognized the potential benefits and resource from developing relationships with others in a similar situation to themselves, it seemed that mothers' personal motivation and background and the child's supposed and declining lack of interest in birth culture generated obstacles and barriers. One mother reported how her middle class background prevented her from joining a group that may have been an important source; whilst another explained a discontinuation on heritage issues on her adopted child's lack of interest and willingness to engage. Both of these mothers had adopted their children as babies from South America. At the time of adoption,

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they had given little consideration to the child's ethnicity. Their desire to be mothers combined with a desire to help children from a poorer nation dominated their thinking. As the children grew older, these mothers report, on occasion, feeling the need to connect with others in a similar situation to themselves, that is, in transracial family settings. However, it would appear that their social class background acted as a barrier to such social capital building. The mother in the quote below describes this social class conflict and the feeling of difference and non-belonging:

There was a group in Long island who had adopted from Latin American countries, and they used to have picnics, get together and so forth. And I was being a snob about this – they tended to be blue-collar families. And I wasn't looking to make connections. I went to one event and they already knew each other. The level of discourse was rather different.

Leaving aside the various obstacles and barriers in sustaining an ongoing contact with such groups, it was noted that adoption based groups were largely centered around white parent members with non-white children. Thus, although mothers reported expanding their network through such adoption groups, in reality there was limited contact with people of colour, that is, outside of TRA children's friends' networks.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this study, participant accounts point to the identification of a number of individual and group relationships that were considered to be a vital resource. Heterogeneity of experience was found in relation to these networks which highlighted parental efforts, and perceptions of benefits from such relationships. The range of source of support via social networks included

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personal relationships (for example family, friends, neighbours), minority role models, schools as site of social capital building, community engagement, and membership through associations and groups.

Evidence from our study shows that whilst personal ethnic identity remains important, there is a process of bridging and linking social capital that contributes to new constructions of identification within families. Indeed, it is the saliency of diversity and difference which acts as a driver for families to seek out different forms of social capital through the process of bonding, bridging and linking (Putnam 2002). Our findings reveal that a range of conscious / sub-conscious bonding, bridging and linking social capital activity is underway in TRA families (Hill and Thomas 2000). Notably however, the multiplex reality of intersectionality calls into question the rigidity of the conceptualisations of 'bonding' and bridging' social capital. For example, through the experiences of one Jewish mother discussed above, we can see how the close relationship with the Caribbean baby-sitter (Auntie Clara) could perhaps be construed as inter-ethnic bridging, but also bonding social capital, that is, if we conceptualise the bond to be between the baby-sitter and the child.

Bonding social capital with 'others such as oneself' was found to exist in cases where mothers forged links with other white adoptive families through associations and groups. Social class and, at times, single motherhood were key bonding features here. Evidently, the existence and activities of such groups serve as an attractive feature for such families resulting in social support, and a shared identity. Such commonality is perceived as empowering and provides the basis for reciprocity, trustworthiness, values, norms and belonging (Putnam 2007). Such links can serve as a useful resource for the parents, however it may be argued that such activities are a form of 'native' 'culture keeping', 'cultural

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tourism', and 'staged authenticity', and may lead to the reification and marketization of culture, and do little for the racial and cultural socialization of adopted children of colour (Jacobson 2008, Quiroz 2012, Sweeney 2016).

Our findings reveal, however, that TRA families also strive hard to achieve bridging and linking social capital through their relationships with individuals, groups and communities of colour. At times, a diminution of bonding social capital is the trigger for the development of such bridging and linking social capital across cultural and racial lines. For example, an adoptive mother who experienced negativity and social exclusion from her own wider family network reported her experiences of bridging social capital. Our study suggests that such relationship building is arduous and extremely limited in the lives of such families (Sweeney 2016). However, where it does exist, it can lead to the development of trust and reciprocity between different ethnic groups (Twine 2010). Linking social capital is generally conceptualized as the process of linking to more powerful individuals and groups at different levels of authority. Arguably, the relationships with members of the adopted child's ethnic/racial background may be viewed as both bridging and linking social capital. Adoptive mothers recognized the 'cultural power and authority' vested in these groups, and this was indeed an attractive feature in the desire to forge links.

Our findings suggest that white adoptive families perceive access to minority individuals and communities as a source of support and strength (Twine 2010). Such bridging social capital manifests itself in multiple ways from practical help with hair braiding and cuisine to emotional, psychological and social support. The role of such support in promoting the adopted child's identity and belonging is considered to be vital by these families (Thomas and Tessler 2007). Arguably, such bridging social capital could be viewed as the 'weak'

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networks, perhaps initially at least, which possess useful knowledge and resource not found in the more established 'strong', and existing homogenous social relationships (Burt 1992, Granvetter 1974, 1995). This may help at a practical level, for example, hair and skin care, and also at a more emotional, psychological and social level to promote and strengthen understanding of lived experiences of people of colour. Crucially, personal and social relationships through such bridging social capital can support white adoptive parents to explore and understand the needs and concerns of their adopted children, and generate new forms of bonding social capital for their adopted children. In other words, there is an emergence of the embedding of experiences in a context that is relational and experiential rather than 'selective appropriation and consumption of renovated cultural symbols, artifacts and events' (Quiroz 2012:527).

A 're-construction of diversity' that does not bleach out ethnic specification has been identified as important in social capital building (Putnam 2007). Our study shows that there was little evidence of such re-construction. For example, where mothers struggled to forge links and widen their network of relationships across racial boundaries, it was sometimes due to their conceptualization of their child's ethnicity as being the 'same as them', that is, white and normative (Waters 2010). Putnam's warnings against assimilation tendencies to make 'them' like 'us'; but instead opt for a "more capacious sense of 'we' " was, however, evident in other findings from our study. Our study shows that some mothers operated within a 'we' framework and embraced the child's ethnic heritage as inherently important for the child and the transracial family, and embedded themselves in racially diverse communities to build bridging social capital for the purposes of identity and belonging as a racially mixed family unit. For example, by embracing African-American neighbours and babysitters as key members of their social network, these families were demonstrating a shift in personal and

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social relationships in the context of the 'new we'. Here, in addition to relationships with people of colour, and links with resources in communities and neighbourhoods, schools were also seen as a site for the building of bridging social capital for the parents and bonding social capital for the children.

Adopted children were generally reported to have a racially diverse circle of friends through school, and many had friends who shared a similar ethnicity. Adoptive mothers' own network of friends was less racially diverse in comparison and signified a tendency to be drawn towards others 'like them'. Arguably, adopted children of colour could potentially act as a gateway, for their adoptive parents, to secure bridging social capital with people of colour. Our study suggests, however, that whilst 'child related social capital' presents possible opportunities for bridging social capital, there are challenges in making this a reality (Nast and Blokland 2014). A number of contributory factors were found to act as key obstacles to race and class-crossing, and boundary work including mothers' own feelings of 'otherisation' / exclusion, mother's conceptualization of the child's heritage and child's supposed lack of interest (Scroggs and Heitfield 2001).

Previous research into TRA has made an important contribution to our understanding of the characteristics and motivations of white adoptive families adopting children of colour, both at a domestic and international level. Moreover, over the last few decades we have accumulated a good evidence base about the importance of identity development and a sense of belongingness for these children. In recent years, attention has also been focused on parental racial/cultural socialization. This has tended to incorporate parental attitudes towards race and ethnicity including efforts to deal with racism, racial composition of TRA family's

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neighbourhood, and their social networks (McRoy et al 1984, Andujo 1988, tatliVonk 2001, Nast and Blokland 2014).

We would argue that the tri-partite typology to racial/cultural socialization we have previously contributed to the literature on critical race work in adoption – ‘Humanitarian/Colour-Blind’, ‘Ambivalence-ism’, and ‘Transculturalism’ - can help signify the strategies and efforts of mothers in their construction of social capital (see Barn 2013). Transcultural mothers appear to strive for direct and everyday connections and lived reality with the racial/ethnic community background of their adopted child. Humanitarian/Colour-Blind mothers seem to gravitate towards people of the same ethnicity as them in associations/groups for network building and support. And finally, the Ambivalence-ism mothers demonstrate efforts to reach out to the child's racial/ethnic community, but seem generally disappointed with their lack of success. Here, we can observe that the impact of intersectionality to argue that social class, and ethnic background difference of these mothers was a possible hindrance. Interestingly however, the Transcultural mothers appeared not to experience the same barriers in spite of their social class, and ethnicity differences. This would suggest that the perceived or actual discrimination may lead to loss of opportunities for some individuals in relation to a multiplex construction of intersectionality.

It is important that social capital is perceived as a useful heuristic tool in making sense of the ways in which TRA families build and sustain their support networks. TRA families' experiences are mediated by the forms of social capital available to them through personal, social and community networks. Significantly, the adopted child represents an important gateway in accessing and acquiring different forms of social capital. Thus, the child's racial/ethnic difference acts as a lever in a number of different domains to forge



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relationships that are deemed to be beneficial. Our findings show that some mothers became active agents in securing social and support networks in their efforts to promote identity and belonging. Conversely, an understanding of challenges and obstacles (including social class, perceived difference/rejection) in this process is also essential to help understand how social capital is related to intersectionality and the ways in which it is read, performed and expected (Tatli and Özbilgin 2012). Indeed, the framework of social capital is strengthened with the added lens of the multiplex constructions of intersectionality. There are important lessons here for child welfare clinicians working with TRA families whether this is the process of assessment, training or post-adoption support. Our study demonstrates the ways in which white American adoptive mothers identify, construct and maintain their support networks, and the factors that enable or hinder such activity. This could help promote understanding of TRA families' needs and concerns. Such understandings can assist adoption agencies and support groups who have an important role to play in helping families to make useful connections with homogenous and heterogeneous groups to promote their social capital and thereby the adopted child's sense of belongingness and identity. By taking a social capital approach to understanding what it is that white adoptive mothers do in exposing their children of colour to contexts and people who share their child's cultural, racial and ethnic background, this paper has sought to contribute to the literature to advance the field of transracial adoption research, theory and practice.

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